

Spirits of Being, Spirits of Becoming: Bororo Shamanism as Ontological Theatre

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Crocker, John Christopher. *Vital Souls: Bororo Cosmology, Natural Symbolism, and Shamanism*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985. xiii + 380 pp. including photographs, appendices, bibliography, and index. Foreword by David Maybury-Lewis. \$29.95 cloth.

I

At last, we have access to the first detailed study in English of the cosmology of the Central Brazilian Bororo tribe. Numerous articles on different aspects of this society, some quite influential, have already been published by the author (Crocker 1969, 1977a, 1977b, 1979). Since Lévi-Strauss's visit with the tribe in the 1930s, the Bororo have become a renowned example of the heights of baroque embellishment to which a "dual organization" may rise, daunting in its complexity and noteworthy for its dialectical subtleties. A comprehensive treatment of the socio-cosmological architecture of the Bororo has long been awaited. *Vital Souls*, published 20 years after Crocker's fieldwork, only partially fulfills these expectations, further raised by the panegyric bestowed by Lévi-Strauss and displayed on the jacket cover.

Halving the difficulty, and echoing the Bororo's own dualism, the book deals only with "one-half" of the cosmology—the domain of *bope*, the metaphysical principle that is opposed to the *aroe* principle as process to structure, substance to form, and time to space, among other things. A second work is projected in which the *aroe*-related realm, which receives an introduction in Part IV of *Vital Souls*, will be amply described. However, in spite of the much welcome description of the *bope* shamanistic complex and animal symbolism, for those familiar with the Bororo literature, especially Crocker's own articles, the book introduces little by way of new ethnographic or theoretical material. If the book was written for non-specialists, as stated (p. 12), then a great deal is demanded of those confronting the intricacies of the Bororo world for the first time. This aim might be more readily met if one were to approach the Bororo through the *aroe* side of things, since this leads more directly to the institutional apparatus of this society that is its physical, sociological, and religious center.

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Stylistic idiosyncracies and text organization, added to the inherent difficulty of the subject matter, make for slow reading. The reader's patience and astuteness are tested before the text allows us to discern the contours of the Bororo symbolic universe—a universe whose metaphysical grandeur is as imposing as the Greek or Chinese cosmologies.

Nonetheless, the overall result is positive, *Vital Souls* consolidates an extremely rich set of ethnographic materials and indicates fundamental questions and lines of inquiry. With reference to the theory, a mix of venerable culturalism tempered with Lévi-Straussian structuralism, the book shows the potential of "symbolic anthropology." Despite Crocker's adherence to certain methodological clichés ("concomitant variations", etc.—pp. 6–7), he demonstrates not only the possibility but the necessity of cosmological analysis without recourse to sociological explanations of either the causal or expressive kind. It is no mean accomplishment to produce a non-Durkheimian interpretation of a society that seems, at first glance, to have emerged from the pages of Durkheim and Mauss's *Primitive Classification*. Bororo ontology—if we have rightly understood the point of the book—is *not* a metaphor, reflex, or effect of social organization; rather, social organization reveals itself, in its institutions and tensions, to be a specific codification of a cosmology that embraces it. Social institutions appear as materialized social thought—and this social thought is, above all, thought *tout court*. As Crocker warns in concluding his exposition of the animal symbolism of the *bope* spirits (p. 193):

But one thing should be clear: whatever functional relevance to the stresses and sociological dilemmas in Bororo social relationships can eventually be teased out of these various 'natural' codes and behaviors, there must be a certain material that can be understood only as thought, or as the agencies of a certain kind of thinking in which the world of natural forms is comprehended rather than interacted with or metamorphosed for social purposes. The *bope*, that is, exist over and above whatever hidden purposes we might discover for them. They are not reducible to one or another kind of 'language' to talk about the more mundane aspects of human life.

We may thus find a justification for Crocker's decision to use Bororo discourse about "Nature," or disorder, as the initial vantage point from which to introduce their philosophy. The entire social clockwork, with its complex mesh of gears and mechanisms of names, clan privileges and ceremonial renderings, whose transcendental correspondent is the world of the *aroe*, exists as an artifice to stand up to the world of becoming, the world of the *bope*, antecedent and omnipresent as the substance and exterior of the *socius*.

II

The Bororo have traditionally practiced hunting and gathering along with some corn cultivation. Currently, their population of 720 is distributed among six villages scattered throughout the southwest part of the Brazilian central plateau¹. The region is ecologically diverse ranging from extensive savannah to dense forests along the margins of the São Lourenço river running through the heart of the tribal territory. Although each Bororo settlement is politically autonomous, it may be considered an equivalent, if nowadays partial, expression of an ideal village whose spatial layout is the paradigm of social and cosmological organization. This village

is circular and divided along the East-West axis into two "matrilinear" exogamous moieties, the Exerae and the Tugarege. Each moiety is subdivided into four clans and these in turn are divided into subclans and household groups. Membership in clans or smaller subunits is not derived from any genealogically constituted categories defined with respect to common substance and ancestry. Rather, it is thought of as a corporation of *names*, an aggregate of beings of identical "logical essence" (Crocker 1979:265). The clans divide the universe into eight directions and eight classes of beings which are the *aroe*, the clan "totems". This totemism is, therefore, purely analogical-onomastic and not genealogical or sacrificial. *Aroe* is a concept that refers to the formal-nominal essences of living species and individual humans (in whom it is identified with the soul, the breath, and the personal clan name) as well as with certain spirits and the souls of the dead. The latter inhabit the world of their clan's *aroe*, far removed from daily life, in a chilly subterranean environment stripped of all temporality. The *aroe* are logical forms, spacially inscribed identities, "spirits of classification" (p. 36). Each clan's *aroe* are represented mainly as emblems—ornaments, songs and names—whose usufruct is zealously guarded. Bororo ceremonial life center around clan-sponsored representations of the *aroe*.

The opposition between village center and periphery is no less fundamental than that between moieties. The houses of the village circumference encircle the central ceremonial plaza in whose center is erected the "men's house," itself divided into Exerae and Tugarege halves, which serves as the bachelors' sleeping place. Post-marital residence is uxorilocal and this, combined with the "matrilinearity" of the clans located on the village circle, give the periphery a markedly feminine and profane connotation. Aside from moiety exogamy, there exist no prescriptive rules for interclan matrimonial alliances. Consanguine kin relations are recognized bilaterally and distinguished from onomastic affiliation to clan corporations. Marriage alliances are subordinated to a more basic system of ceremonial exchanges that create a "symbolic organic solidarity": reciprocal performances of ritual representations of the *aroe* and the impersonation of the deceased of one moiety by members of the opposite moiety.

In the characteristic Bororo style of symbolic inversions, the *aroe* of a clan must be represented by a member of the opposing moiety. As a result, emblems and stagings of the "totemic essences" of each clan can only be enacted by "others"; each moiety and clan is, of necessity, *represented* by its opposite. These reciprocal ties are established between each clan and several others of the opposing moiety, and are the basis of ongoing material and matrimonial transactions. During both male initiation and funeral rites, the intervention of the opposing moiety is just as essential as during marriage. The father and initiator of a man are of the moiety that opposes his own as is his "substitute" after death, the *aroe maiwu* (new soul), who becomes a "son" of the parents of the deceased and, as such, assumes as his own the ritual duties of their dead offspring. This system of funeral substitution is the basic institution of Bororo society (p. 280) and the logical culmination of "representation by the other" that characterizes it. The implication of this are fundamental: uterine continuity of the clans is cut by ritual "patrilineal" succession (a man is substituted by another of his father's moiety and the substitute will thus be a "son" of a man of his own maternal moiety). This reinforces the disjunction and complementarity

between the center and periphery, men and women, and the ritual and quotidian, while simultaneously creating a symbolic dependence between moieties and clans that inhibits any jural "ressonance" of the classic unilineal type. The lack of conflict in Bororo public life, unusual for Central Brazilian groups, can, perhaps, be attributed to this complementarity as well. The construction of the Bororo *persona* is subject to a mirror logic in which each "essence", its *aroe* name, is fully embodied only in an "other" and only after its own death. This is life (and death) as encountered under the sign of the *aroe*, pure forms and identities, whose back and forth exchange weaves the web of society.

The *bope*, the cosmological principle whose antagonism to the *aroe* constitutes the universal dialectic of the Bororo, is the realm of organic life and death, of Nature understood as generation and corruption, violence and change, matter and activity. The *bope*-spirits inhabit the earth and skies, actively intervening in human affairs and responsible for the stuff of life: conception, death, carnal desires, natural rhythms, meteorological events, and unexpected happenings. In living beings, the *bope* principle manifests itself in the *raka*, "blood," or vital force that makes each being act according to its nature. The *aroe* component would be sterile and indifferent without the *bope*, principle of efficacy or difference. The *bope* are masters of time and becoming, "spirits of metamorphosis," fluid, evanescent, protean, and amorphous (p. 132)—the opposite of the categorical immutability of the *aroe*—and chiefly accountable for human affliction.

If the *aroe* relate to metaphor and totemism, the *bope* are beings of metonymy (pp. 99, 127, 213) and "sacrifice".² Bororo maintain their relationship with the *bope* through *bope ure*, "bope food," which is a system of offerings that includes the majority of those kinds of animals eaten by the Bororo and that are given under threat of spirit retaliation. Violation of *bope* dietary rules is the most common cause of death. The significance of the potency of the *bope* is a central question of *Vital Souls* (pp. 134, 254). In order to build his case, Crocker analyzes the animal symbolism involved in food offerings, *bope* shamanism, death and affliction, and concludes by showing that the *aroe/bope* dialectic constitutes the human condition emerging as a supreme paradox, expressed in the book's title: humans are "vital souls", impossible syntheses of form and flux, name and substance, identity and difference, *aroe* and *bope* (pp. 212, 280, 288).

Bororo shamanism derives from this cosmology. In contrast to the remaining societies of Central Brazil, in which dual organizations and institutional complexity (age classes, name groups, ceremonial associations) are not accompanied by an elaborate supernatural and shamanistic complex, Bororo dualism is also manifest in shamanism. There exist two types of shamans, each recruited from one of the exogamous moieties, that mediate relations between humans and the antagonistic principles of *bope* and *aroe*. The former are the business of the *bari* shaman while the latter are the affair of the *aroe ettawa-are* specialists, whom Crocker did not observe in the field and presumed extinct. Bororo shamanistic dualism, which for decades has intrigued ethnographers (cf. Colbacchini and Albisetti 1942:121), receives a convincing interpretation in Crocker's book, beginning with an analysis of the *bope/aroe* dialectic in its manifold expressions. The presumed extinction of the *aroe* shamans is the occasion for a hypothesis (pp. 322–32) that, while interesting, seems not to have been confirmed by events. We can paraphrase Crocker's formulation by

saying that the Bororo concept of *bope* provides their philosophy with a particularly appropriate instrument with which to contemplate history, since history is the province of the *bope* as structure is the province of the *aroe* (cf. pp. 125, 132).

Be that as it may, it is in the context of South American shamanism, whose bibliography is rapidly expanding, that we can situate the most important theoretical contribution of the book to the ethnology of the region. Crocker is especially successful in demonstrating that (South) American shamanism should not be thought of in terms of the paradigm of African witchcraft or, more generally, in terms of an analogic-expressive theory of religion (pp. 19–26). Bororo shamans neither intervene in nor express sociological tensions; they are neither moral doctors nor moral victims. Instead, they are actors in an ontological theatre, whose scenario is cosmic, and society is merely another element in the play and not its unvoiced stage directions. This merits reflexion and, in general terms, may be extended to other South American societies, *cum grano salis*.

III

The Bororo are one of the few Indian groups of lowland South America whose presence has long marked the pages of general anthropology. Along with the ancient Tupinambá and the modern Yanomami, who have taken their places in the Western imagination as cannibals and “fierce people” respectively, the Bororo are celebrated, not for their bellicosity, but as authors of a classic example of pre-logical thought: “We are macaws.” This phrase, recorded by the German ethnographer Von den Steinen in 1894, has entered into the annals of the debate between intellectualists and symbolists (cf. Skorupski 1976), along with the twin-birds of the Nuer, over whether this is to be considered as “metaphor” or “primitive participation.” The statement has been cited by Durkheim and Mauss, Lévy-Bruhl, Lowie, Vygotsky, Geertz, and others; and Crocker’s analysis, which opts for metaphor (1977a), has already been incorporated into the current discussion (Sperber, 1982:152–3). Aside from this dubious honor—which does injustice to the more complex things the Bororo also say—this society became known in anthropology thanks to a magisterial chapter in Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* and to the central place of its mythology in *Mythologiques*, by the same author. In more than one sense, the Bororo have been nurtured as the ideal type of primitive society by the father of structuralism, whether because of the high degree of isomorphism between their different symbolic planes, their internally elaborated social reticulum, or because of their capacity to introject and impose a symbolic plus value on all possible differences, their crystalline style of projecting their guiding cosmological principles onto space, their pervasive dualism, their terse Nature/Culture dialectic and, not least important, for their ambiguous or negative evaluation of historical becoming (cf. their fears centering around the *bope* and the interpretation of contact with whites—*Vital Souls*, p. 329). The Bororo seem to exemplify such a degree of contrivance that Lévi-Strauss even risked a hypothesis as to the conscious contractual foundation of their social organization (1984:184–5). For this very reason, this social organization has been the center of a controversial and widely known analysis postulating the

masking of contradictions and latent asymmetries by a conscious model that imposes the illusion of perfect reciprocity (Lévi-Strauss 1958, ch. VII and VIII).

In summary, the Bororo are a *locus classicus* of structuralism emphasizing a crucial aspect of the theory—that which distinguishes and articulates conscious and unconscious models while grounding the desire for social order upon structural contradictions. Even though the contradictions suspected by Lévi-Strauss (triadism embedded in dualism, endogamy of hierarchical subclans masquerading as moiety exogamy) have not been confirmed (Crocker 1969), *Vital Souls* reveals how the entire Bororo philosophy conspires to conciliate the two antagonistic principles, *bope* and *aoe*, necessarily contradictory and contradictorily necessary, in search of an everlastingly imperfect order. The intractable incongruities of human experience are multiple—human activity consists in imposing forms onto a flux that at all moments threatens to overflow out of them, all imposed symmetry creates an additional asymmetry, ontological duality is irreducible, hence unity is an inherently unstable compromise, and violence and thought are the two sides of the same coin. The mechanisms that characterize the system, logical inversions, inordinate nested isomeric constructions, conceptual loops and a particular emphasis on mediation, express these contradictions while, at the same time, attempting to domesticate them. What is notable about Bororo cosmology is precisely its refinements that have developed to such an extreme degree its capacity to *conceptualize* these questions and its stubborn determination to achieve the logical closure of its axioms. Immersed in its necessary and inexorable failure, Bororo cosmology appears as an anthropological “proof” of Gödel’s theorem, as formally complex and in the same way underlining the inescapable incompleteness of all formal efforts (cf. Crocker 1977b:180–4).

The Bororo are also the object of a unique record in South American ethnography, the *Encyclopedia Bororo* (Albisetti and Venturelli 1962, 1969, 1976). Salesian priests, with the Bororo for almost a century, have engaged in the paradoxical effort of simultaneously working towards “the methodic extermination of the indigenous culture” (Lévi-Strauss 1955:246) and a *complete* compilation of this culture in a monumental encyclopedia of approximately 2500 pages whose wide-ranging topics include the repertory of personal names, ceremonial bow styles, the spirit pantheon, songs and chants, body painting, basket-making, botany, and whatever else may come to mind. This project, rivaled only by Sahagún’s *General History* on the Aztecs (ca. 1580), has resulted in a work of inestimable value, a stock of raw material that should prove useful to generations of Bororo and anthropologists. The *Encyclopedia* is the center of gravity of what nowadays is almost a subdiscipline of Americanism, “Bororology,” tending towards the overly esoteric for lay people (such as myself), yet involving a larger number of practitioners than Crocker’s book would have us guess. The field continues to produce numerous articles and theses while conducting recondite debates among its followers, the most well-known being that between Lévi-Strauss and the Salesian fathers.

It is in connection with this that, before entering into its merits, one must register the most serious misgivings with respect to *Vital Souls*. The intent to write a work accessible to non-anthropologists (p. 12) cannot justify a use of the ethnographic present that practically ignores the 20 year hiatus between fieldwork and publication. During this time not only the Bororo but their ethnology have grown and

developed. The Bororo population is no longer 500 (p. 29), but 720, a decent rate of growth.³ Also, even though their society continues suffering greatly from the brutality of Brazilian capitalist expansion, to define it as moribund is false and unjust to the Bororo. In an epitaph on page 265 Crocker laments:

The Indians of South America have been dying for over three centuries, and now the whole tragic process is nearing its end. The survivors realize the societies which formerly gave coherence to their lives are putrifying or defunct. Their remaining choice is to die or to acculturate.

Besides being overly pessimistic, to the point of poor taste in choice of vocabulary, this manner of thinking is simplistic in its generalizations and deceptive in the apparently clear alternative it presents between "to die" and "to acculturate" (cf. the discrete disagreement expressed by Maybury-Lewis in the foreword, p. xiii). To state that their conservatism led the Bororo to "choose to die as a people" (p. 332) is, perhaps, fruit of a certain naïveté that takes the pessimism of Bororo elders as a symptom of the decadence of a culture. It so happens that all conservatism tends to be pessimistic and this does not always prevent it from being at the same time resistant and inventive. *Plus ça change . . .*

The presentation of the question as one of "choice" barely conceals a largely *passive* conception of Bororo society because the choice ends up being, in Crocker's terms, between to die or to die, since for the author "acculturation" means cultural death. Besides reproducing a typical ethnological myopia of passed decades,⁴ the author shows little familiarity with the current situation of many South American peoples and professes a conception of culture lacking in sophistication. A culture is an assemblage of answers to questions that history forces a society to pose; if the questions change, the culture will change, without necessarily disintegrating. Unfortunately, many cultures had not sufficient time to alter their rejoinders as the questions posed were too absurd. Such is not the case of the Bororo, who not only continue to survive as a people, but whose option for "acculturation" has not prevented them from maintaining or reviving the institution of the *aroe ettawa-are*, the shaman operating in the context of funeral rites that place individual death at the service of the reproduction of the majestic ideological edifice which is Bororo society as represented by its *aroe*. The abolition of the *aroe* shaman is the cornerstone of Crocker's argument in favor of the supposed cultural suicide of the Bororo (pp. 329–31). With the extinction of these shamans, the Bororo would be extinguishing the very idea of society; only the savage world of the *bope* would remain. This is definitely not the case, and the Bororo have no use for Crocker's *requiem*. Taking all this into account, the ethnographic present adopted in the book becomes *doubly* inappropriate.⁵

In the same vein, it seems improper to omit references to studies of those ethnologists who have worked among the Bororo since the 1960s along with references to other Central Brazilian indigenous groups. Protestations about accessibility and economy of space are not sufficient reason (pp. 12–13). If the bibliography is said to include works also not cited in the text, why not reserve a place there at least for the works of Z. Levak (1971), R. Viertler (1976, 1979), and S. Novaes (1980, 1981)? We are not privy to the reasons for the non-publication of Crocker's 1967 thesis that contains the essential material making up *Vital Souls*. However, what has been written in this interval, while confirming the importance of his thesis and

articles, is a far cry from a simple repetition or minor addition to Crocker's ethnographic effort. Less serious, although irksome, is the lack of mention given to studies of other Central Brazilian Indian groups that deal with themes directly relevant to those raised in the present book. Certainly, Crocker has written what is indubitably the best comparative article in the volume of the Gê and Bororo edited by Maybury-Lewis (1979), and it would be unfair to demand a repetition of what is stated there. Still, it would not have taken a great deal of effort to cite in the bibliography the theses and books of his colleagues in the Harvard/Central Brazil project on the Kayapó and Timbira.⁶

All this would be unimportant if, exactly the contrary to what Crocker asserts, the book was meant for a "few specialists" (p. 13). For the benefit of the general public it would have been desirable academic practice to indicate those works that cover approximately the same ethnographic terrain. The bibliography of *Vital Souls* is sparse in references to South American ethnology and cites few recent works. The effect is that of a book written some time ago and isolated, excepting a few perfunctory passages, from any dialogue with its intellectual context.

Finally, it is disheartening that a book so carefully produced and thoroughly detailed should systematically err in the transcription of Portuguese words, that "marine animals" should have been deposited in a Central Brazilian river (p. 70), and that the Pano-speaking Sharanahua of Peru should have been confused with the Tenetehara, an East Amazon Tupi tribe, more than 3000 kilometers distant (p. 164). One further technical point may also be mentioned. The characterization of Bororo metaphysics as "nominalist" (p. 33), by virtue of the fact that the *aroe*, transcendental correspondents of existing beings, are thought of as being linked to the names of things, seems to be at variance with the accepted uses of the term "nominalism" in philosophy (cf. also Crocker, 1977b:164). The reference to the *aroe* as "Platonic ideals" (p. 268) reinforces this misnomer: if the Bororo are Platonists, a label not wholly inappropriate, they cannot also be nominalists.

IV

Crocker's presentation becomes progressively more intelligible over the four sections that make up the book. The reader must be persistent, as many gaps of reasoning and obscure passages become clear in part IV. The mode of expression is laborious and, at times, opaque; the demonstrations do not follow the customary order, and often it is difficult to distinguish affirmations of the Bororo from the author's own conclusions. The indirect and abstract-generalizing style prevails over the presentation of Bororo discourse, although, when the Bororo appear on their own, they are admirable for their clarity (cf. passages pp. 34, 278, 302). One also misses an examination of the linguistic functioning of the central categories analyzed, such as *bope*, *aroe*, *raka*, *jerimaga*. These flaws probably stem from the need to present such extensive and complex material within the confines of a book and, while they make reading more arduous, in no way diminish the interest or importance of what the book offers.

D. Maybury-Lewis's foreword situates *Vital Souls* within the context of the jointly sponsored Harvard and National Museum of Rio de Janeiro project to study the

peoples of Central Brazil that was completed during the 1960s. The project brought together a team of anthropologists to follow up the pioneer ethnography of Curt Nimuendaju and to further develop the theories of Lévi-Strauss. Ultimately, the project was responsible for a theoretical renovation within Brazilian ethnology and resulted in various theses, articles, several books, and the collection *Dialectical Societies* (Maybury-Lewis, ed. 1979), that should be consulted as background reading for the problematic developed in *Vital Souls*. The comparative intentions that sparked the project never acquired consistency, partly because of internal theoretical dissension. Nevertheless, the effort managed to establish the existence of a pan-Gê social and cosmological metastructure. Maybury-Lewis claims a direct relation between the Bororo facts and the Gê problematic (p. xii). It is by no means certain that Crocker would wholeheartedly agree. Although the Bororo share common features with the Gê—circular villages, uxorilocality, sexual opposition linked to a concentric dualism, highly developed “sociological” ceremonialism, the importance given to naming relations, cosmological dualism, etc.—their social organization appears to be elevated to a higher level of complexity and their cosmology contains strong analogies with non-Gê themes in their mythology, shamanism, personal eschatology, and theories concerning the soul.⁷ The functioning of the *bopelaroë* opposition, where the *bope* “are” *aroë* and vice versa, and the system of ritual inversion transforms the Bororo into the only Central Brazilian society that is truly “dialectical.” The dualism is Gê societies, then, would be merely a weaker version of the Bororo system (Crocker 1979: 249).

The Gê and Bororo coincide, however, on one particular point of strategic theoretical importance for anthropology. Originally described as possessing unilinear descent, later research has established that such a characterization was either false (Kayapó, Timbira), of limited value (Shavante, Sherente), or essentially inaccurate, since it attributed a genealogical character to corporations based on other criteria (Bororo). Thus the Gê and Bororo were of pivotal importance for a critique of “African models” from a South American perspective. Crocker’s writing is particularly crucial in this connection because he demonstrates that a society so evidently “matrilinear” as the Bororo was neither so markedly matrilinear nor so accurately described as such and that the very vocabulary of the Africanist-genealogical languages should be discarded in this case. This can be verified on pages 30–32 and in part I of *Vital Souls*.

On the other hand, if “descent theory” fares poorly among the Bororo (and Gê), “alliance theory” also meets with difficulties in a way that is even more interesting. The Bororo-Gê, in spite of being societies that exemplify in extreme the institutional application of the Lévi-Straussian principle of reciprocity and demonstrate the idea that exchange is as effective as unilinear succession in grounding the social whole and its reproduction, *do not* operate with prescriptive alliances in the sphere of marriage. Marriage does not follow an “elementary” formula of restricted or generalized exchange, while kinship does not constitute a central code for the accomplishment of reciprocity. We are presented with a case of societies based on “elementary structures of reciprocity” (Overing Kaplan 1981) that are not elementary structures of kinship since the majority of Gê-Bororo kin terminologies are of the Crow-Omaha type. Lévi-Strauss recognized this difficulty (1958, ch. VI; 1984: 182) without being able to solve it. Crocker and his colleagues have shown how

naming relationships and ritual transactions encompass and determine relationship terminology and matrimonial strategies. The location and identification of the true level of "elementarity" of these social systems has destroyed, in the process, the fetishism of considering, *a priori*, kinship as the dominant level in all primitive societies.⁸

This is the background of *Vital Souls*, which does not tarry long on Bororo social organization but rather approaches it from its flip side, its relations with the *bope*. In the "Prologue," the author presents a history of his research, the theoretical concerns that guided him, a brief summary of Bororo ethnography, and his intention for the book to explore how the Bororo "understand the flux of individual lives in terms of what they call the *bope*" (p. 13). To this end he is obliged to analyze shamanism and animal symbolism and to situate the *bope* in its opposition to the *aroe*.

An "Introduction" follows, where the theoretical problems of shamanistic studies are examined along with an outline of Bororo social organization and cosmology. Crocker affirms that all Amerindian (and Siberian) societies show a similar kind of shamanism and ponders why it should be that sociological explanations of African witchcraft have met with more success than analogous attempts to explain shamanism. In broad strokes, the answer is that the "organic analogy" prevails in "witchcraft" societies (African, Indo-European): body, society and cosmos intersymbolize each other and the foundation of all disorder or pathology is a morality that is, in the final analysis, sociological. In the case of this macro-type of cosmology, the traditional analysis is sufficient. As employed by practitioners from Durkheim to Mary Douglas, the method is based on a sociological-symbolist interpretation of individual death and affliction—the witch, the social drama, the somatic metaphor, etc. Compared with this standard, Amerindian shamanism and associated theories of affliction appear singularly mechanical, deterministic, amoral and "asociological." Witchcraft is hardly stressed and the most common association between affliction and human intentionality is made in terms of a morality more "ecological" than "sociological," namely, the violations of taboos while hunting or preparing food (pp. 23–24). However, every single study of dietary rule symbolism took as a basis the "organic analogy" and this simply does not hold for "shamanistic" cosmologies. The real problem, therefore, "is how shamanism and food codes relate to canons of human morality" (p. 25), and this is the theme of the book, as well as the fundamental point in Crocker's thesis.

Crocker removes the critique of "African models" to the plane of cosmology. In terms of Bororo and Gê social organization we have seen how what may be called the "genetic analogy," the paradigm of the corporate group genealogically conceived, is inadequate and the same holds for the "somatic analogy" that attempts to explain shamanism and sickness. The body is not a microcosm of society, Nature is not a metaphor of Culture. They confront, rather than symbolize, one another in the context of a totalizing cosmology that embraces them both. The Amerindian ethic as expressed through shamanism is closer to that of Spinoza—being ontological—than to the morals of Durkheim.

Whether Crocker's argument is wholly valid for other South American societies remains an open question. I believe that he underestimates the importance of

"sociological" witchcraft or sorcery encountered in many groups (Upper Xingu, a few Gê). One must also take into account recent studies that demonstrate the fundamental articulation between categories of social classification and the shamanistic-sorcerer complex (Albert 1985 for the Yanomami) and the role of ritual in the simultaneous production and coordination of physiological, sociological, and cosmological processes. But Crocker seems basically correct in generalizing from the Bororo that the Amerindian shaman operates directly with time, space, form, identity, and otherness; he functions more as a philosophical concept than a sociological allegory. The more general implication of all this for anthropology is that existing notions of "Society" and the sociological paradigm (morphological or processual) will have to be radically reexamined beginning with an analysis of the questions that recent South American ethnology is bringing into focus.

Part I analyzes the Bororo logic of substance: the *bope* in its manifestation as "*raka*". *Raka* is an energy that exists in finite quantities in each individual and animates all living beings. Its conservation is the object of numerous rules and its loss is the efficient cause of all death. The underpinning of theories concerning procreation, heredity, individual character, sickness, dietetics, death and sexuality is *raka* thermodynamics. Its functioning carries analogies with North Amazonian systems where cosmic energy is a "limited good" whose circulation is ritually controlled (*Vital Souls*: p. 42; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976).⁹ The concept of *mori-xe*, or "revenge," which underlies all exchanges between Nature and Society and whose intervention is indispensable in the funeral system, also rests on the logic of *raka* (pp. 58–9, 280–ff.).

The articulation-disjunction between physical procreation—linked to *raka* and the conjugal unit—and the ritual production of the *aroe*—linked to naming and parents' cross-siblings—constitutes the dialectic of the Bororo *persona* as an unstable synthesis of "natural self" and "social self" (p. 67). The dual faceted *persona* is a widespread theme in Central Brazil (Melatti 1968). *Raka*, as the substance of kinship, possesses but a limited potential to constitute collective identities and principally works to define gender relations, especially marriage. "Species"—the clans—are "soul" units of *aroe* and not "blood" units. For this reason, the domestic group, empirical substrate of the clans, is the locus of the confrontation between *raka* and *aroe*, between the organic-serial production of individuals and the nominal-spatial perpetuation of the clan *personae*. The domestic group is charged with structural tensions and the result is rampant marital instability among the Bororo.

The analysis of *raka* in Part I, despite the intrusion of some unclear passages,¹⁰ illuminates in an original fashion the Bororo social dynamic, from the paradoxes inherent in relations between the sexes to the singular combination of solidarity between same-sex affines and endemic conflict among same-sex siblings that inverts the usual pattern found on the continent.

Part II is the heart of the book, where the concept of *bope* and associated natural symbolism are examined in detail. One perceives that the *aroe/bope* system is *sui generis*, irreducible to analogs of other cosmologies. If it evokes the Chinese *yin/yang* in its exhaustive and binding complementarity and its correlation with the sexes (the *aroe* and "more" masculine, the *bope* "more" feminine) (p. 180), the Bororo also posit a radical heterogeneity between the two principles and an asymmetric

infusion of values in the dichotomy (p. 267, 313). One also notes that the principles are "reified" in spirits with their own existence. Another possible analogy would be with the Aristotelian distinction between form and matter, but the *bope* possess an intrinsic dynamic that tends to fall outside this sort of scheme. The most apt parallel is that of the Platonic opposition between Being (*aroe*) and Becoming (*bope*). However, in the Bororo case, the converse of the world of ideas is not merely a world of copies or simulacra. The *bope* are not imperfect *aroe* and there is no unilateral encompassing of Becoming by Being. In fact, the *bope*, as concepts of vital movement, are *aroe* and as such are counted among species of one of the clans belonging to the moiety linked to the *bope* (the other is linked to the *aroe*, cf. pp. 125–6, 198–201). On the other hand, the *aroe* "are" *bope*, not only by virtue of their property of excess in relation to the world of terrestrial copies which can attain monstrous proportions (the epitome of the *aroe* is the *aije*, a spirit with all the characteristics of a *bope*) but also because the ultimate power of existence rests on them since they constitute the essences of all things (pp. 313–314). What applies to the *aroe* and *bope* is true for the totality of Bororo philosophy and for the two kinds of shamans as well:

This culture posits its intellectual and social organization on the assumption that everything exists by reason of an internal dialectic. In every possible abstract mode it is itself and its own antithesis. (p. 314)

One could state that a thing is only *fully* itself at the "moment" of its antithesis. The entire body of *Vital Souls* demonstrates this proposition. If there exists such a thing as dialectical savages, these can only be the Bororo.

What seems to be at stake in the *aroe/bope* pair is a way in which the general problem of ontological difference is to be resolved. In the *aroe*-moment, difference between things is subsumed by identity (of things to their concepts); the "spirits of classification" are the spirits of identification. In the *bope*-moment, identity of things is subordinated to difference; the "spirits of metamorphosis" make things come to be and cease to be, causing them to act according to their distinctive natures (and to act is to modify). The *aroe* concern identities and representations; the *bope*, differences and transformations. Accordingly, the *aroe* world is representational, actualizing itself through sociological rituals, where distinct groups *become representations* by means of emblems and a "sacerdotal" shaman; the *bope* complex is sacrificial, bringing all men to Nature by means of meat offerings to the spirits and a shaman who *represents a becoming* by "magically" incarnating the *bope* (cf. pp. 267, 273).¹¹

Part II continues with an analysis of the symbolism of "*bope* food" animals, those animals that are "themselves *bope*," and "*bope* omens." Classical theories of classificatory anomalies (Douglas, Leach, Bulmer) and the use of the notion of polythetic classification (Wittgenstein *via* Needham) are discussed. The central point of this section lies in the exploration of the associations between "*bope* food" animals, women, cannibalism, and sexuality. Here the essential ambiguity of the human condition begins to become clear: men are food of the *bope* but also *eat* this food, i.e., *bope* food animals. The imaginary of cannibalism, fundamental to all South American cosmologies, seem to also underlie the Bororo symbolic system.

Part III is a detailed analysis of the *bari*, the *bope* shaman, focusing on his recruitment, initiation, powers, and attributes. The ambiguous and contradictory cosmological statutes of the *bari* and his nature—simultaneously antisocial and indispensable to society, an "anti-man" (p. 220) or walking paradox—are excel-

lently analyzed in this section that features the richest ethnographic material in *Vital Souls*. The opening of chapter 7 is an exercise in mental gymnastics. The vertiginous inversions of the Bororo must be painstakingly followed. They lead to the rule that the *bari* should be recruited from the Tugarege moiety (because the *bope* are *aroe* of the Exerae moiety and as such can only be contacted by someone of the opposite moiety) and therefore the *aroe* shamans should be from the Exerae moiety. The discussion of the paradoxes created by the death of a *bari* and the difficulties of his substitution also receives an admirable treatment (pp. 211–3).

An analysis of the food offerings and shamanistic cures performed by the *bari* and his spiritual battles to rescue souls kidnapped by the *bope* follows. The animal metamorphoses and the auguries of the *bari* are then discussed (pp. 243–6). To close out the section the cases of three shamans are presented and examined, and the chapter concludes with a restatement of the “amorality” of affliction and Bororo shamanism (pp. 259–261).

Part IV rounds out the book and introduces what could be the center of Crocker’s next work: the *aroe* shamans and their connection with the Bororo funeral system (p. 266). The outlines of the *aroe* system are sketched and the natural symbolism of the *aroe* is reviewed: the animals “themselves *aroe*” and the *marege mori-xe*, or “revenge animals” that are an *aroe* analog of “*bope* food”. The death of revenge animals is essential for the restoration of the balance between Nature and Society, *Bope* and *Aroe*, thrown out of kilter by human death. Pages 284–290 are the climax of the book, where the successive partial interpretations advanced up to this point are consolidated to show how the human condition is constituted by the intersection of attributes of the *bope* and *aroe*, both in their pure forms and in their animal manifestations. The inevitable and pathetic conclusion of Bororo philosophy that killing and thinking, creation and destruction, are two sides of an identical reality—the only one possible—is masterfully described.

The subsequent chapter analyzes the initiation and powers of the *aroe* shaman, contrasting these with the attributes of the *bari*. However, like the latter, the *aroe ettawa-are* are also removed from social morality (p. 308). If the *bari* is an “anti-man,” the *aroe* shaman is a sort of precocious defunct, a type of pure *aroe* and, in this sense, an incomplete person as is the *bari* (p. 295). This radical disjunction between the two shamans and their function to express the two antagonistic aspects of the human condition is examined in depth in chapter 11, which explores how the attributes of the two shamans are submitted to multiple inversions as part of the obstinate Bororo effort to let nothing escape through the interstices of their dialectic. As Crocker iterates

The *bope* and the *aroe* are so unlike that each requires a non-overlapping specialization of their human intermediaries. This asymmetrical duality is institutionalized through the moieties and again at the level of the clans, and it permeates natural classifications. ‘Everything,’ said one shaman, ‘is on one side or the other; nothing is between.’ Mediation in this sort of structure requires not so much the fluid power of the limens, but the strength of inversion. (pp. 313–341)

The final chapter is the already mentioned four-page epitaph on the extinction of the *aroe ettawa-are* and the cultural death of the Bororo. It is unnecessary. What we need is Crocker’s next book in which those problems left hanging may be resolved¹² and we can learn more about the fascinating ideas of the Bororo universe.

NOTES

1. I bring Crocker's counts up to date. What follows is condensed from pages 29–36 of *Vital Souls*.
2. Crocker disagrees with the characterization of the *bope* rites as "sacrifice" (p. 152). See note 11.
3. In 1983, the publication *Aconteceu! Povos Indígenas no Brasil* (CEDI—São Paulo) reported 697 Bororo in six villages (p. 261). Sylvia C. Novaes (University of São Paulo) provided me with the more current figure. Crocker also estimates (p. 29) that the Bororo population was 50,000 before their contact with Europeans. This seems way too high. Neither in the book nor in his 1967 thesis does the author inform us as to the sources or the basis of this calculation.
4. As in the case of Nimuendaju and Schaden for the Guarani, Wagley and Galvão for the Tenetehara, Huxley for the Kaapor, and Da Matta for the Gavião, each ethnographer closed his monograph with a prognostication of the imminent demise of the people he had studied. In Wagley (1977), one finds a lucid self-criticism of this tendency (cf. also Matta's preface in the 2nd edition of Matta and Laraia, 1978/1967); and in almost every case mentioned above, history took it upon itself to falsify these predictions.
5. In assessing Crocker's pessimistic conception of the Bororo's destiny, one could suggest that he misconstrues the centrality of death in Bororo cosmology and ritual life as a vital disenchantment foretelling a collective cultural death instead of as an ingenious mechanism for social reproduction. I thank Sylvia Novaes for this observation and also for the information that the *aroe* shamans continue to function, including in the villages that Crocker researched, and perhaps have never ceased their activities in the recent past. It may also be the case that Crocker's detached view of the Bororo is responsible for another slight ethical slip when he uses personal names in contexts that are sometimes disparaging to the persons involved.
6. There is another book that deserves mention in this context, namely, A. Seeger's work on the Suyá. The book gives an extensive treatment to the cosmology of this Central Brazilian tribe whose many similarities and differences with the Bororo are of equal interest. Themes that run quite close to those of *Vital Souls* are explored, particularly the relationship between animality, sexuality and olfactory symbolism; and an analysis of the "Nature/Culture" opposition that evokes Crocker's argument on pages 121–2 (Seeger 1981:21–2, 34, 119). It is true that Seeger, for his part, did not register the analogies between Suyá odor symbolism and the Bororo *jerimaga* (Crocker 1967:199–200, 330–35). At any rate, Crocker should have mentioned that the Suyá are no longer a group of just twelve people as they seemed to have been when he considered studying them (*Vital Souls*:10) but of more than 100 and, like the Bororo, alive and well!
7. I think in particular of Tupi-Guarani cosmology. The idea that the Bororo represent a transition between the Gê and Tupi, moreover, has already been advanced by Lévi-Strauss for the field of mythology and eventually explained on the basis of geographic contiguities (1964:151; 1971:546, 551). The special posthumous destiny of the *bari* shaman (*Vital Souls*:129, 211–12), the conception of the person in terms of an opposition between name-breath-soul on one side the body-blood-food on the other, as well as the featured place conferred on cannibal-related symbolism—all closely evoke Tupi-Guarani figurations. From another quarter, recent research among the Northern Gê (Maria Elisa Ladeira, Gustaf Verswijver, Vanessa Lea) has suggested a much greater similarity between the social organization of these peoples and the Bororo pattern of corporate groups located on the periphery of the village circle and associated with a repertory of names and emblems.
8. On the other hand, the terminological systems and marriage among the Gê and Bororo continue to present enigmas only partially explored until now. Their dependence on naming relations and ceremonial exchange does not entirely solve the questions raised.
9. The Bororo conception, however, seems to give more weight to a constitutive entropy of the *raka* in individual bodies: temporal irreversibility in the ebbing of *raka*, the notion that all death has as its efficient cause the loss of *raka* (p. 54). It is also interesting to note that, in distinction from other South American nosological theories in which sexual contamination involves a maleficent absorption of alien blood (where pollution is an *excess* of alien substance), the Bororo theory of pollution always implies a *loss* of one's own substance (the *raka*) (p. 60).
10. Specifically, it is stated (p. 50) that the young of any species, including humans, are surcharged with *raka*, while on pages 61 and 100 it is said that the *raka* of small children is very weak or in small quantities. The affirmation that the sharing of *raka* is restricted to the conjugal unit (or to parents and

small child—pp. 66, 81) is incongruous with the relation between the *raka* and siblingship, and *raka* and household groups.

11. The *aroe/bope* opposition thought of in this manner, if it were not for its potential for multiple inversions, recalls the Ojibwa system of "*totem*"/"*manido*" analyzed by Lévi-Strauss (1962a:25–33) and generalized in the contrast between totemism and sacrifice (1962b:294–302). One notes that during the *aroe*-moment representation encompasses becoming, while the opposite occurs during the *bope*-moment. I cannot find enough justification for Crocker's objections to the use of the notion of "sacrifice" for *bope* rituals (p. 152). If he accepts and appropriately employs the Lévi-Straussian concept of totemism for the Bororo, he should then accept the notion of sacrifice in the logical and broad sense used by Lévi-Strauss. For Lévi-Strauss the essential feature of sacrifice is precisely metonymy (*Vital Souls*:348 n.12), the defining aspect of *bope*-human relations. The correlation *aroe*:emblems::*bope*:animal meat (on the one hand, feathers and metaphors, on the other, meat and metonymies) brings to mind yet another structure analyzed by Lévi-Strauss (1962b:141–42).
12. The disjunction between clan attributes and the right to ritually represent them, which links the two moieties by inversion, is not always clear. Thus, the *aroe* of the culture heroes Bakororo and Itubore belong to one clan of the Tugarege moiety, obliging their incarnation by a clan of the Exerae moiety. In contrast, the titles of the war chiefs Baitogogo and Borogei, belonging to the Tugarege clan, are not represented by Exerae men (p. 199). In the same vein, on page 268, Bakororo and Itubore are given as *aroe* of a Tugarege clan, while in the Appendix (pp. 337–8) they are listed as belonging to Exerae clans. The logic of succession after the death of a *bari* by his *aroe maiwu* (funeral substitute) would necessarily mean that there would always be *bari*-shamans of the Exerae moiety and in this way the normative connection between the *bari* and the Tugarege moiety would become muddled.

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